

Government Orders

Mr. Boudria: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I am prepared to agree with that if the House will then agree to put the question at that point.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): I wonder if I could ask for further clarification. Are we only speaking about the 20-minute intervention or are we also including the 10-minute question or comment period? It is just the straight 20 minutes.

Members have heard the suggestion of the government whip. Is that agreeable to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): The member for the Battlefords—Meadow Lake will have 20 minutes and I will put the question forthwith upon conclusion of his intervention.

Mr. Len Taylor (The Battlefords—Meadow Lake, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I seem to have achieved something extra to what I wished. I was suggesting that when the House sits next I would conclude my remarks. However I am quite prepared to do so now.

I appreciate the opportunity to say a few words on this very important bill. I have had a considerable amount of influence over the bill during the last four years. I am very much aware that the bill has been at least seven years in the making. When it was first proposed to the previous Parliament by the now leader of the Bloc Quebecois and then Minister of the Environment, I happened to be the New Democratic member responsible for environmental protection issues. Therefore I was asked by my party to sit in on discussions of Bill C-78 and to represent the New Democratic Party throughout the committee process on the piece of legislation.

I was quite taken by the responsibilities I was given at that time because the House will recall there was a great deal of criticism of Bill C-78.

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The government began at that point a process that I think should be recommended for many other pieces of legislation. What began with Bill C-78 was something called a prestudy of the bill. In other words before the bill was introduced in the House the specific bill was presented to the parliamentary committee to have a look at it and allow for some intervention before the government actually introduced it and before the government would claim ownership of the wording of the bill.

The prestudy process gave us an opportunity to examine the bill without the partisan interventions that occur often when sides dig in on a debate and will not yield any ground. The

prestudy phase of Bill C-78, short as it was, began the process of openness about the bill.

When Parliament of the time prorogued and the new Parliament began, the bill was reintroduced as Bill C-13. I had hoped at that point that with the prior work that had been done by the parliamentary committee Bill C-13 would have been amended by the government before being introduced into the new session. That not being the case, we were given an indication that the bill would be amended in committee with the approval of the government.

We began the process of amending the bill. Again something happened in committee that I am very proud to say I was a part of. I would commend it to the government and to future governments as a way of dealing with legislation in a very non-confrontational way. The government indicated that it was prepared to accept amendments from the committee and we proceeded to approach the bill with that understanding. I submitted over 110 amendments to the committee for study.

The point that I want to emphasize is that the committee chose to bring in legal experts to sit with us in the committee while we went through that amending process. Two environmental lawyers who had appeared as witnesses were brought in by the committee, Mr. Bill Andrews and Mr. Brian Pannell. They sat around the table and advised members of the committee about the legality and the practicality of amendments.

It was a great exercise and one from which the committee benefited a great deal. In fact the country benefited a great deal from it because Bill C-13 was amended with their assistance. As a result the bill that has now been proclaimed by the government is the bill we amended. The member for Davenport being a member of the committee at the time, myself and others worked very hard to find the best possible bill in the spirit of compromise that needed to exist to achieve that result.

The environment committee is presently doing a massive study of the Canadian Environmental Protection Act. I would commend the use of environmental legal experts when the committee sits down to conduct its final review of the act and write the report that must be written which may indeed result in some additions, changes or amendments to the Canadian Environmental Protection Act. I believe the process of utilizing legal experts was of great benefit to us.

Now we are at the point where after a year of waiting we have Bill C-13 proclaimed, the agency about to be established, a new environmental assessment process about to begin, some new regulations in place that are going to guide us through some very important assessment work into the future, and a couple of